DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 147 SO 031 448

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TITLE Team Work: Sports and the Law.
INSTITUTION Constitutional Rights Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.
PUB DATE 1996-00-00
NOTE 13p.; For related lesson plans, see SO 031 449-452.
AVAILABLE FROM Constitutional Rights Foundation, 601 South Kingsley Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90005 ($3.95). Tel: 213-487-5590; Fax: 213-386-0459; Web site: http://www.crf-usa.org/.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basketball; Business; Citizenship Education; Intermediate Grades; Law Related Education; Role Playing; *Salaries; Secondary Education; *Social Responsibility; Social Studies; Teamwork; *Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS Constitutional Rights Foundation; *National Basketball Association; *Professional Sports

ABSTRACT

This lesson plan uses students' interest in sports to teach good citizenship. With its focus on rules, responsibility, conflict resolution, and teamwork, the unit emphasizes the development of critical thinking, decision-making, and citizenship skills in young people. This lesson plan is part of a series of fully prepared, interactive classroom lesson plans offered by the Sports and the Law program of the Constitutional Rights Foundation. Each lesson includes detailed teacher instructions, background information, and student handouts. This lesson presents a National Basketball Association (NBA) mock draft. Students roleplay team owners, players, and members of an arbitration panel while dealing with free agency, the salary cap, and building a competitive team. (BT)

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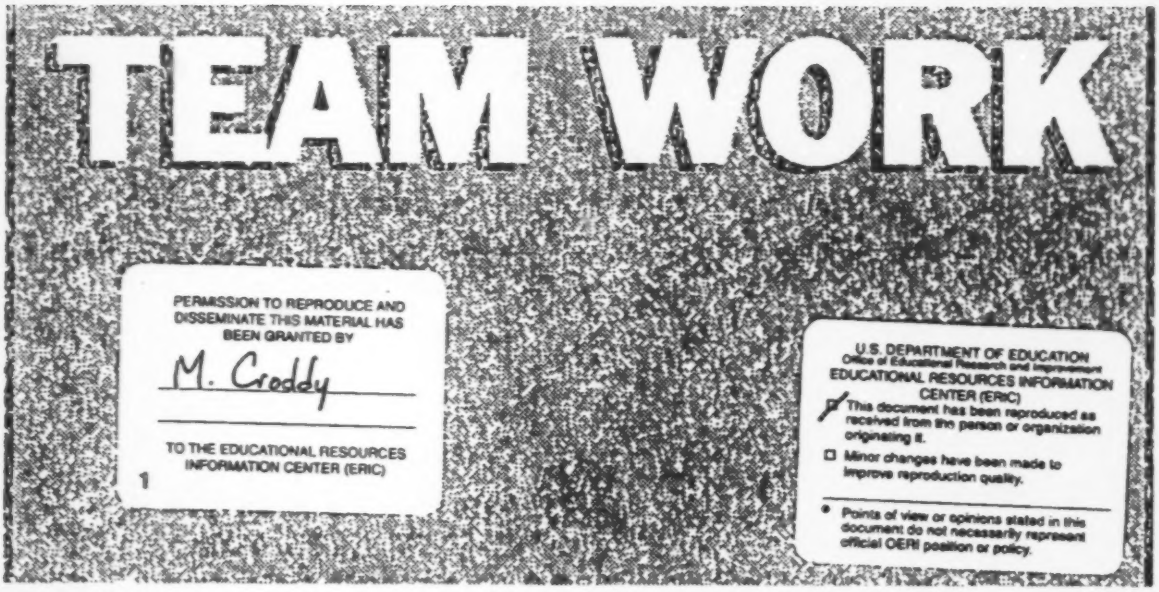
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Introduction

Constitutional Rights Foundation's *Sports and the Law* program uses students' interest in sports to teach good citizenship. By learning how rules—on and off the playing field—relate to society, students acquire knowledge necessary to become responsible citizens and effective participants in our democracy. CRF believes that good sportsmanship is good citizenship. With a focus on rules, responsibility, conflict resolution, and teamwork, *Sports and the Law* emphasizes the development of critical thinking, decision-making, and citizenship skills in young people.

This mini-unit is part a series of fully prepared, interactive classroom lesson plans offered by the Sports and the Law program. Each mini-unit illustrates important aspects of law and society and promotes an understanding of law-related concepts by linking the excitement of sports to broader social issues.

Overview

This two-lesson mini-unit explores the pros and cons of the NBA salary cap and its influence on the way basketball teams are put together.

In Lesson One, students role play players, team owners, and review panel members who must decide whether to keep an NBA salary cap of $16 million per team per year.

In Lesson Two, students work together in small groups to assemble a competitive team under the rules of the NBA salary cap. Each group must fill 10 roster spots under the imposed salary cap of $16 million. Groups will attempt to put together "the best team on paper."

Objectives

Students will:

- Practice cooperative learning, critical thinking, and decision-making skills.
- Evaluate the pros and cons of an issue (the NBA salary cap).
- Identify and distinguish player positions and tasks in basketball.
- Manipulate player statistics, player contract information, and salary cap guidelines to create a desired result.
- Compare attitudes about an issue (the salary cap) before and after exploring it.

Materials and Preparation

Lesson One

- **Handout A—The NBA Salary Cap**—1 per student

Lesson Two

Team Management Packet—1 per student

- **Handout B—Teamwork Terminology**
- **Handout C—Teamwork Player Roster**
- **Handout D—Teamwork Player Pool**

Prepare a method for drawing lots to determine the order of a five-team draft (e.g., selecting cards from the ace through 5).

Lesson One: The Pros and Cons of the Salary Cap

A. Focus Activity

Ask students:

- How much money do pro basketball players make? (They make millions of dollars per year.)
- What will happen to ticket prices if salaries continue to go up? (Ticket prices will rise.)
- Do you think limits should be placed on NBA salaries? Why or why not? (Accept various answers. Explain that this has been a controversy in the NBA as well as other sports in recent years.)

B. The NBA Salary Cap—Reading and Discussion

1. Distribute **Handout A: The NBA Salary Cap** to students. Ask students to read the handout.
2. When they finish, hold a discussion by asking:
   - What is a salary cap? How much was the NBA cap in the handout? (A salary cap limits the total amount of money a team can pay all its players per season. In Handout A, the NBA salary cap was close to $16 million [15.96].)
   - What are the best arguments in favor of a salary cap? (Accept various answers.)
   - What are the best arguments against a salary cap? (Accept various answers.)

C. Role Play—Players, Owners, and Basketball Commissioners

1. Tell students that today they are going to play the roles of basketball players' representatives, team owners, and league commissioners who must decide whether or not to establish an NBA salary cap of $16 million per team per year. Tell them each person will make a two-minute presentation before a commissioner in a group.
2. Divide the class into groups of 5-6 students each (preferably 5). Assign two students in each group to be player representatives. Assign two others to be team owners. Assign one student the role of league commissioner. (If you have six in a group, assign this person as another commissioner.)
3. Regroup the class so students can consult with one another while preparing for the role-play. Player representatives should sit on one side of the room, team owners on another side, and commissioners in front. The player representatives and team owners should think up their best arguments and the commissioners should think of questions to ask each side.

4. Reassemble the groups of 5–6 students and begin the role-play. Call time for all the groups according to the following schedule:

   Player representative #1 . . 2 minutes

   Team owner #1 . . . . . .2 minutes

   Player representative #2 . . 2 minutes

   Team owner #2 . . . . . .2 minutes

   Commissioner's questions .2 minutes

   Remind them the commissioner(s) can interrupt anytime to ask questions.

4. When the role play ends, allow the commissioners time to make their decisions. Then call on them to give their decisions and the reasons they decided as they did. Tabulate their votes on the board.

5. Debrief the role-play by asking: What were some strong arguments? Why?

Lesson Two: Building a Team

A. Preparation for Small-Group Activity—Building a Team

1. Inform students that NBA teams must build teams with players who fit within the salary cap. Tell students that in a few minutes they are going to break into groups and role play owners of professional basketball teams and try to assemble a championship ball club within a salary cap of $16 million.

2. Distribute a **Team Management Packet** to each student. Review the packet as follows:

   - Ask students to read **Player Positions** on **Handout B: Teamwork Terminology**. Inform them that their team will need two players at each position.
   - Ask students to read **Contracts** on **Handout B: Teamwork Terminology**. Answer any questions they may have.
   - Explain **Handout C: Teamwork Player Roster**. The first four players (1–4) are already on their team. The next two (5–6) will be taken in a draft. The final four (7–10) will be signed as free agents.
   - Inform them that all the players are listed on **Handout D: Teamwork Player Pool**. Tell them to pay particular attention to the

column in capital letters: POS., RATING, and SALARY. Explain that each player has a performance rating expressed as a decimal such as 3.2. (This rating does not exist in real life—it's just so students can get the best team "on paper.")

3. Tell them that their goal will be to get a team that:

   - has the highest-possible player performance rating; and
   - stays beneath the $16-million NBA salary cap.

   Remind them that each team must have two players at each position.

B. Small-Group Activity—Building an Effective Team

1. Divide the class into five groups. (Note: This activity can also be completed by students working alone or in pairs, but to do this, the draft simulation must be eliminated. This will mean that students can choose any **Draft Choices** on Handout D.)
2. Have each group draw lots to determine its order in the draft. Before beginning the draft, give the groups a couple minutes to decide who they want to pick from **Draft Choices** on Handout D.
3. Begin the draft. Give each group one minute to make its choice. Have students cross out each player who is picked so they will know who is left to draft. Make sure students record their two draft choices on Handout C.
4. After the draft, tell the groups to fill the other four positions on their roster from the list of **Free Agents** on Handout D. Remind students that they must:

   - have two players for each of the five positions.
   - **not** go over the salary cap of $16 million.

5. After the four new players have been added, give each group the option of trading one player on the roster for one player on the list of **Free Agents**. Tell them to cross off the old player and add the new player and his information and to make appropriate adjustments in their totals.
6. Have each group total up the team's performance ratings and salary. Determine the final results by comparing performance ratings of all teams who completed their Teamwork Roster under the salary cap. The highest rating wins.

C. Debriefing—Making Choices for Teamwork

Ask students:

What do you think it takes to build a winning team? Do you need a star? A strong leader? A well-balanced team?

How did the salary cap influence your efforts to build a good team?

Do you think a salary cap helps or hurts the NBA? Explain. (Compare student opinions to those they held after Lesson One.)

The NBA Salary Cap

In sports, a great deal of attention has been focused on the issue of salary caps. Imposed by the league, salary caps put a limit on the amount of money a team may pay its players in one year.

Salary caps are controversial. Most owners favor them because they cut down on team expenses. Players oppose them because they put a limit on their salaries. In recent years, differences of opinion between owners and players over salary caps have resulted in a strike by major league baseball players and a lock-out of hockey players by their owners.

Today, you are going to explore some of the pros and cons of the salary cap controversy in the National Basketball Association. For one recent season, the NBA salary cap for each team was $15.96 million. The total amount paid to all players on a team had to fit under this cap. You will become player representatives, team owners, and NBA commissioners. Your task will be to decide if salary caps are good or bad for basketball. To do this, you will want to be familiar with the pro and con arguments that you will find on page two of this handout.

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The NBA Salary Cap

SALARY CAP PROS AND CONS

Arguments FOR a salary cap (Owners)

1. **A salary cap keeps rich teams from spending huge sums of money on high-priced players.** This allows a team in a smaller city to compete equally with teams in larger cities that have more income.

2. **A salary cap helps limit runaway pay scales for popular players.** It protects owners from unlimited player salary demands.

3. **The salary cap helps keep costs down and makes team expenses more stable.** Stability teams attract investors who are interested in seeing expenses remain roughly the same over a long period of time.

Arguments AGAINST a salary cap (Players)

1. **It is illegal to restrict the possible earnings of an individual.** In a free-market economy, players have the right to earn the best possible salary.

2. **A salary cap is a tool that the owners want because they cannot control competition between themselves.** On one hand, owners complain about skyrocketing salaries. On the other hand, they offer huge contracts to star players.

3. **For every salary cap rule there will be a loophole or exception.** These "special cases" will defeat the purpose of the salary cap.

For Discussion

1. What is a salary cap?
2. What are the best arguments in favor of a salary cap?
3. What are the best arguments against a salary cap?

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TEAMWORK TERMINOLOGY

Player Positions

POSITION 1 This is the **POINT GUARD**, who is responsible for bringing the ball up court and calling plays; usually leads the fast break and shoots from outside.

POSITION 2 The off guard, or the **SHOOTING GUARD**, usually provides the outside shooting for a team; usually not as good at handling the ball as the point guard; often shoots off the dribble or drives to the basket; sometimes helps rebound.

POSITION 3 The **SMALL FORWARD**, is generally a good outside shooter and scorer; with the off-guard, gets downcourt on the fast break; may help with rebounding.

POSITION 4 The **POWER FORWARD** is a strong, rugged player who plays strong defense under the basket and rebounds; not usually a team's leading scorer, but must be able to get offensive rebounds and score; often called an "enforcer" because of aggressive play.

POSITION 5 The **CENTER**, often called the post, is frequently the tallest player and may score from close range. Some teams want their center to score a lot; others use the center for shot-blocking and rebounding.

Contracts

DRAFT The procedure for selecting players from the pool of amateur (usually college) athletes who want to turn pro. Teams select in reverse order of final standings from previous season; NBA uses a lottery to determine the drafting order of the teams that do not reach the playoffs.

MINIMUM The lowest salary that can be paid to a player under contract; NBA salary minimum is $150,000.

RATING The value of each player based on performance.

ROSTER The specified number of active players that make up a team; NBA rosters have a maximum of 12. Your team will have a roster of 10.

SALARY CAP Imposed by the league, it puts a limit on the amount of money a team may pay its players in one year; the total amount paid all players must fit under the cap.

STATUS The present state of the contract between a player and a team; player may either be under contract (in the third year of a five-year deal) or be a free agent.

FREE AGENT At the end of a contract, a player may offer his services to any team in the league and is free to sign a contract with any team in the league.

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TEAMWORK PLAYER ROSTER

NAME	POSITION	STATUS	RATING	SALARY
Players Already Under Contract				
1. **James Benton**	1	Contract	3.1	.5m
2. **Michael Richards**	2	Contract	4.2	3.2m
3. **Tab Guthrie**	3	Contract	2.5	1.5m
4. **Anthony Graham**	4	Contract	3.0	1.0m
		Subtotal	13.1	6.5m
Draft Choices (Rookies)				
5.		Draft		
6.		Draft		
		SUBTOTAL		
Choose Players Below from List of Free Agents				
7.		Free Agent		
8.		Free Agent		
9.		Free Agent		
10.		Free Agent		
		TOTAL		

REMINDER: **Your team must have two players for each of the five positions. Salary cap is set at $16 million.**

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TEAMWORK PLAYER POOL

Name	POS.	Ht.	Wt.	Yrs.	RATING	SALARY
			Players Under Contract			
James Benton	1	6-5	195	3	3.1	.5m
Michael Richards	2	6-5	215	7	4.2	3.2m
Tab Guthrie	3	6-10	240	3	2.8	1.8m
Anthony Graham	4	6-9	245	8	3.0	1.0m
			Draft Choices			
Jamaal Kelly	1	6-4	205	R	3.6	3.5m
Jimmy Ross	1	6-8	210	R	3.6	1.6m
Ethan Johnson	2	6-6	190	R	3.8	2.2m
Will Powell	2	6-6	195	R	3.2	1.5m
Gary Harper	3	6-8	225	R	4.0	3.2m
LaDonn Mims	3	6-7	240	R	3.5	2.7m
John Harris	4	6-9	250	R	3.1	2.8m
Gerald Rogers	4	6-8	230	R	4.0	3.6m
Ed Mobley	5	7-0	275	R	3.3	2.1m
Yalde Dorgasz	5	7-2	265	R	2.6	1.8m
			Free Agents			
Lloyd Loverton	1	6-4	210	10	3.0	.8m
Fennis Jordan	1	6-1	180	10	3.2	1.0m
Shawn Knight	1	6-3	180	7	3.2	.7m
Bill Simpson	1	6-6	194	5	3.1	1.3m
Tracey Cooper	2	6-7	215	10	2.5	.5m
Robert Hopson	2	6-6	198	9	2.7	2.6m
P.J. Morris	2	6-6	180	6	2.6	.5m
Bennie Sims	2	6-4	200	12	3.6	1.3m
Tony Coleman	3	6-10	230	12	3.0	1.0m
Kenny Grimes	3	6-5	210	7	2.8	1.7m
Dante Mills	3	6-10	235	6	4.1	3.8m
Donnell Wilson	3	6-8	218	13	3.3	3.2m
Theo Britton	4	6-11	247	10	2.7	.7m
Harvey Gibson	4	6-10	235	8	4.2	3.7m
William Kellogg	4	6-9	235	6	2.5	.5m
Thomas Watts	4	6-7	210	4	3.3	.6m
Bryant Carr	5	7-1	245	12	2.6	1.2m
Charles Dunham	5	6-11	240	8	2.6	1.5m
Perry Ellsworth	5	6-10	225	6	3.1	1.3m
Rodney Parsons	5	7-0	230	14	2.6	.9m
Bobby Williams	5	7-0	260	7	3.2	2.2m

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